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SOUTH VIETNAM, SEPTEMBER 1974

- I was in Vietnam ten days. In addition to discussions in Saigon I visited and talked with Vietnamese and U.S. officials in Can Tho, Chau Doc, Nha Trang, Pleiku, Kontum, Qui Nhon, Danang, Hue, Huong Dien, Chu Lai, and Quang Ngai.

- Among the Vietnamese the atmosphere can be described as one of grim realism and concern.

- The grim realism was a reflection of their recognition that they must make do with levels of military aid which they believe represents less than their essential needs.

- Their concern is a concern for the future when faced with the next all-out NVA offensive, an offensive which the RVN is certain will come. Their only question is when.

- There are an almost endless number of questions which may be asked about Vietnam's present condition and future prospects. I tried to focus on a handful of them which I feel are the crucial issues.

✓ - The state of the RVNAF. The state of the armed forces is essentially sound. It is unlikely that it has ever been better.

- It has demonstrated flexibility of response and the employment of new tactics during the heavy fighting of this summer and early fall.

- In talking with commanders one obtains straightforward, non-equivocal responses to hard military questions which reflects that they are on top of the situation.

- More surprisingly, RVNAF commanders provided frank criticism of the shortcomings of some of their less effective combat units.

- As to the concerns of the military leaders, not one commander I queried expressed serious concern over problems of maintenance and spare parts. Their principal military worries related to the availability of ordnance, POL, and the number of helicopter hours allotted them.

- Their other overriding concern was the impact of inflation upon their soldiers. General Lahn of the RVN Marine Corps expressed it quite succinctly. The price of a daily ration of rice plus one egg equals a Marine private's salary. In consequence, General Lahn encourages his troops to write home for vitamin supplements.

--- In sum, while not dismissing the fact that there are both strong and weak outfits in the regular armed forces, on balance, the RVNAF is sound.

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SECRET

25X1

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- The Capability of RVNAF to Defend RVN. The RVN's regular armed forces are the equal of the NVA/VC. By the nature of the war, i.e., RVNAF defending SVN while the NVA/VC select the targets to be attacked, the Communists will continue to experience local headline-catching successes. However, these initial successes will be rectified by RVNAF counteractions. An example of the kind of action and response which can be expected in the future was seen in the recent military operations in Quang Nam where this type of scenario was played out.
- There is one qualifier to this assessment of the South Vietnam regular forces. Hanoi retains six divisions in North Vietnam. Should they be deployed to South Vietnam, it is unlikely that the RVNAF will be able to contain them without U.S. air support.
- The State of the Regional and Popular Forces. The condition of the RF and PF program is deplorable. The concept simply is not getting off the ground. With a few notable exceptions, the RF and PF are not willing or able to resist the encroachments of either regular or guerrilla forces.
- The effectiveness of the RF/PF program is crucial to the future of RVN. There is no way that the handful of RVNAF divisions can maintain order and stability in South Vietnam without a rigorous RF/PF to control the countryside and suppress local insurgent efforts.
- Breathing new life into the RF/PF program must be one of the GVN's highest priorities. The GVN is aware of the problem and some pilot programs to put more fibre into the RF are being undertaken. Examples of this are General Nhuts' (2d ARVN division) plan to integrate an RF regiment within his division and General Lahn's (Marine Division) interspersing RF elements among his Marine units to give the former more fibre.
- But these are "quick fixes." The RF/PF program needs much more than this.
- Will Hanoi Conduct a Major Offensive in 1975 of the Same or Greater Intensity than 1968/1972? Arm-chair strategists take various positions on this question. That element of the RVNAF military leadership located closest to the point of the sword shrug their shoulders and say they simply don't know.
- This is not a reflection of their disinterest in the question. Rather, it is a measure of their realism.
- In effect what they are saying is that they know what the Communists' military capability is -- they can commence their offensive tomorrow. However, they are unable to answer the questions concerning intentions because the indicators are not yet present.
- ✓ - My judgement is that Hanoi has not yet made up its mind. The purpose of the Communist attacks of the past three months has been to test and attrite the RVNAF.

SECRET

25X1

- Based upon their after-action analysis of these battles, the North Vietnamese will make their decision.

- Conservatism has long been a hallmark of the NVA. Considering the outlook of the Super Powers, it is unlikely that Hanoi will undertake its next big offensive until it has a high degree of confidence in its success. Thus, the strength (or lack thereof) of the RVN response to the Communists' summer-fall operations will weigh heavily in the coming decision by Hanoi.

- What Will be the Key Intelligence Indicators Which Will Signal Hanoi's Decision to Opt for a "Big War" Strategy? The consensus judgement is that there will be two crucial indicators. These are: (a) detection of the southward movement of the North Vietnam's strategic reserve divisions; and (b) a shift in the objectives of COSVN as expressed in its directives and resolutions to its cadre in South Vietnam.

- Will the U.S. Intelligence Community be Able to Give Forewarning of Hanoi's Intention to Shift to a "Big War" Strategy? My judgement is -- very probably -- yes. Quervina facilities both in Vietnam and Thailand, hi

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- The one lingering doubt, expressed by several members of the intelligence community concerned the Communists initiating their offensive with the forces already in-place in South Vietnam and moving their strategic reserve only after the offensive had commenced. Thus, the indicator considered to be crucial, i.e., movement of Hanoi's strategic reserve, would no longer have significance.

- My judgement is that while this represents a NVA capability, it is a course of action that Hanoi is unlikely to pursue. It still takes 21 days to move a division-size force from NVN to RVN's MR-3 without any interdiction of LOCs. The NVA would run a grave risk of failing to meet its timetable if it opted for such a course of action.

- Concerning gaining early warning through receipt of COSVN resolutions and plans, the likelihood of obtaining this information is high. The Communists must prepare their cadre in advance of a planned offensive. Sufficient time must transpire to insure that instructions are passed from COSVN to the district, village and hamlet cadre. I judge that the time required to accomplish this will give us adequate warning time.

25X1

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- What Will be the Outcome Should Hanoi Opt for a Major Offensive in 1975? Given the assumptions that the North Vietnamese will employ their strategic reserve and that the United States will not provide air support, the outcome of such an offensive for the Republic of Vietnam will be grave. As a minimum, I would expect the loss of the balance of Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces in MR 1, Kontum, Pleiku and most of Binh Dinh in MR 2, Tay Ninh and the northern tier provinces of MR 3, and a sharp reduction in territory and population control in the Delta.

- What is the Condition of RVN's Economy and How Crucial is the Inflation Problem? It is easy to paint a bleak picture of South Vietnam's economy. Inflation continues to run at high annual rates. Unemployment in urban areas is a serious problem. Various efforts to initiate new businesses and industry are moving slowly (fish processing, fertilizer, sugar mills, and milk products plants are examples). At the same time, to overstate RVN's economic problems is to ignore the strengths of what still is essentially a subsistence agricultural economy. In sum -- economic problems in RVN are serious but not crucial, and the military confrontation is the key to the economic health of South Vietnam.

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CAMBODIA - SEPTEMBER 1974

- The atmosphere in Cambodia in September 1974 was one of war-weariness.
- While it is difficult to construct an evidential basis, one senses a tacit acceptance by the GKR that the war is unwinnable.
- One FANK general staff officer expressed it succinctly. When queried as to who would win the war, he shrugged his shoulders and responded, "All depends on super-powers."
- While the Cambodian war may not in fact be winnable, it is unlikely that the war will be lost in 1975. Expressed another way, there are no signs that the FANK will collapse.
- On the contrary, the conclusion I drew was that the FANK is every bit the equal of its KC adversary.
- To list the shortcomings of FANK is both a lengthy and tedious exercise. It is also not particularly germane.
- The important question to ask is, --- how effective is the FANK compared to the KC?
- When this comparison is made, the view of the FANK changes markedly and perspective improves, for the KC army is no model of military efficiency.
- The KC's weaknesses have been illustrated very clearly during the fighting of the past year. Their principle failures are four:
 - inability to conduct effective operations above the battalion level.
 - inability to effectively employ combined arms.
 - inability to sustain combat operations,
 - inability to exercise adequate communications security.
- The FANK, for its part, has had few successes and its offensive capabilities are severely limited.
- However, the FANK has been stubborn defenders as has been noted at Kompong Cham, Kompong Seila, and in the environs of Phnom Penh.
- Concerning FANK morale, no one will tell you it's good. The overriding problem is, of course, the inflationary spiral. The FANK soldier and officer simply cannot make ends meet. This results in the selling of

S E C R E T

25X1

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military equipment, weapons, MOGAS and AVGAS, "flower" soldiers, "phantom" soldiers -- even the selling of close air support sorties.

- However, KC morale is by no means sky-high. Frustrated by their lack of any break-throughs, the KC "true believers" are having increasing difficulty maintaining tight control over the rank and file. ✓

- On balance, FANK will lose individual battles, make much publicized mistakes, but so long as there is no major influx of North Vietnamese men and material it will continue to be a match for the KC.

- The question -- "Will there be a "big" offensive in Cambodia in 1975?" -- was repeatedly posed.

- It is characteristic of today's Cambodian environment that there has been only limited consideration of that question made by U.S. representatives in Cambodia.

- As was the case in the story of "Peter and the Dike," they are much too interested in keeping their fingers in the worst holes to worry about whether there will be a tidal wave a few months hence.

- Generally speaking, however, it seems that a "big" war in 1975 in Cambodia is unlikely.

- Hanoi continues to call the tune in Indo-China. For a number of reasons, it is not in North Vietnam's best interests to terminate the war in Cambodia. Without increased support by Hanoi the KC cannot overwhelm the GKR.

- However, there is much concern within the Phnom Penh based U.S. community concerning the adverse effects upon the GKR of an unfavorable vote in the UN.

- They view the UN issue with much greater alarm than the Washington intelligence community. Some consider an ousting of the GKR from the UN will be the straw that will break the GKR's back.

- As was alluded to earlier, another problem is inflation. There is hope that regardless of the initial upset which the increases in the price of rice and POL in conjunction with the doubling of military and civil service salaries have brought to Cambodia that in the longer run these measures will help.

- However, there are few economists who view it as anything more than a stopgap measure to hold things together.

- U.S. political analysts see that the time is ripe for reopening serious negotiations. They argue that the FANK/GKR plight will likely become worse rather than better in the coming year.

S E C R E T

Approved For Release 2005/11/23 : CIA-RDP80B01495R000500050022-1

-2-

25X1

S E C R E T

Approved For Release 2005/11/23 : CIA-RDP80B01495R000500050022-1

25X1

- The stumbling block to negotiations continues to be the same -- who or what group would represent an acceptable team of FANK/GRUNK - GKR/FANK negotiators, i.e., without Lon Nol and Khieu Samphan?

- In sum and as usual, the view from Phnom Penh continues to be very serious. There is every likelihood, however, that the GKR will last through 1975. However, few analysts believe that in the long term time is on the GKR's side.

S E C R E T

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25X1

THAILAND - SEPTEMBER 1974

- The atmosphere in Thailand is one of nervous uncertainty. ✓
- The nervousness is engendered by the present Thai government's commitment to "the experiment in democracy." No one is quite sure how it will turn out.
- Among the U.S. community there is definitely a split vote on its outcome. Some believe Thailand will stumble forward into some form of parliamentary democracy. Others are confident that it will lapse into the more traditional form of Thai leadership of the past forty years -- a quasi-military dictatorship.
- By and large, the old hands see little likelihood that the experiment will be truly successful. Among younger heads there is more expression of belief that there is a reasonable chance of success.
- All agree, however, that the October 1973 student revolt which led to the Thanom/Praphat outster was no momentary aberration. It was a real Thai historical watershed.
- One of the principal questions raised concerns the sincerity with which the RTA supports the Sanya government.
- Clearly the single most powerful element in Thai society, without the army's support the Thai government cannot function.
- To date, KRIT SIWARA has supported both the king and the Sanya government. Whether he will continue to do so depends on several "ifs" the principal ones being
 - if the Thais are able to put together a constitution in a reasonable amount of time.
 - if the Thais are able to form a reasonably responsible and responsive Parliament.
 - if the new Thai Parliament acts with restraint towards the military, i.e., does not endanger the latter's perquisites and positions within the corporate structure of Thailand.
- Regardless of the government's success or failure in responding to these "ifs," Thailand is embarked on a new course.
- While the military may, and likely will, exercise more overt control than it does today, things will never go back to the Phibun, Sarit, Thanom type leadership.

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- In the very near term, there is a good deal of concern over the coming 14 October ceremonies -- marking the first anniversary of the student revolt, the cremation of the martyrs of that struggle will take place at the end of a three day national student holiday. Students from all over Thailand are expected to converge on Bangkok.
- Elaborate security measures are being taken by the army and police to monitor these ceremonies. However, most important is the fact that the King is expected to attend them. Due to the reverence with which monarch is held by all Thais, his presence will likely go far in keeping the situation in hand.
- Still, the potential for violence is clearly there. The students have had a taste of power and it is pretty heady stuff.
- The insertion of 18 year old right to vote clause in the new draft of the Constitution by means of street demonstrations needs heeding. It is the likely harbinger of more to come.
- No one can tell what will happen on the fourteenth of October. Given the numbers involved, there is every likelihood of disorder. The question is less if there will be disorder but of its scope and intensity.
- The police, of course, would be the most likely target. Bearing the principal blame for the deaths of last October, at least in the eyes of the students, this is where the spark may touch the tinderbox.
- While the presence of U.S. forces on Thai soil is not a crucial problem to Thailand, the political attractiveness of the issue for dissident elements is almost irresistible.
- For this reason the likelihood that it will become an important problem for United States foreign policy makers in the next few months is great.
- We have long counted upon the essential conservatism of the Thai ruling elite to insure support for continued U.S. military presence on Thai soil. It would be unwise to bank on this too strongly in the future.
- Among the Thai leadership is the growing judgement that U.S. commitment to SEA is fading. The uncertainty in this regard makes them less likely to fight those elements in Thailand who wish the U.S. military presence to disappear.
- At the same time the Thai leadership recognizes the continuing danger which the PRC represents, regardless of the present atmosphere of detente. And on the short term, they recognize the danger implicit from NVN if the latter can establish hegemony over all of Indo-China.
- What the Thais really would like is the best of both worlds. They would like assurance that the U.S. would defend them but that this defense would somehow take place from somewhere other than Thailand --- from Indonesia or the Philippines for instance.

- These varying factors related to our military presence in Thailand lead this viewer to one conclusion. If the United States fails to force the Thais to focus on the problem, i.e., to determine what they really want for their future, a decision may be reached on the basis of expediency driven by internal Thai politics which may not be in that country's best interests.

- Making public a U.S. decision to withdraw our forces from Thailand at a specific but not precipitous rate would likely best define this political issue for Thailand.

- In this regard there is wisdom in the view of the former West Point and Yale football coach Herman Hickman who once said -- the mark of a successful coach is one who, when being run out of town by a mob, makes it appear that he is leading a victory parade.

- The Communists' insurgency in the north, northeast and south, is one of the least electric issues in Thailand.

- Yes, there is an insurgency. Yes, some increase in the numbers of insurgents and the incident rate is observable. And no, it is not viewed as an important problem by the Thais.

- I am persuaded that the Thai view is correct. In the north the principal issue is an ethnic rather than a ideological one - not dissimilar to South Vietnam's inability to cope with their Montagnards. Land control among the Meos and the Thais is far more important than Communism. In the south it is primarily an ethnic and social problem of Muslim/Malay conflict with the Buddhist/Thai. In the Northeast, the issue is poverty and neglect by the central government. In all three cases there is little likelihood that the problems which feed the insurgency will go away.

- On the other hand, given the levels of support that Hanoi and Peking are providing, it is unlikely that the problem will magnify in the next few years.

✓ - Two almost diametrically opposed views of the Thai economy have been presented.

- One reflects a pessimistic view of these facts: (a) Thailand is for the first time about to feel the effect of their population explosion; (b) new arable land is almost gone; (c) the Thai farmer employs the least efficient agricultural practices in all SE Asia; (d) the timber industry is declining; and (e) there is expanding expectations among urban workers for advancement of their quality of life which continue to be unfulfilled.

- That Thailand has economic problems is undeniable, but it is a rare corner of the globe which does not have its share of economic difficulties in 1974.

- However, the key judgement is the Thai economy is basically sound. Most important, it is capable of resolving most if not all of the problems

set forth above. As one measure of its basic strength, Thailand has increased its level of foreign reserves in a year in which it had to meet the costs of a tripling of the prices of their essential fuels.

- The degree of economic upset in Thailand next year will be more apparent than real.

- The next year will likely see continued economic unrest in Thailand. It will center about demands being made by urban workers who for the first time have become aware of the benefits of united action.

- In summary, whatever the uncertainties are concerning the future, it is clear that October 1973 made certain Thailand would never be quite the same again.

- The coming year will continue to reflect the nervous uncertainties growing out of that event. There will be more disturbances in the coming year, more conflict between the Establishment and those who would wish to move perhaps too far and too fast in the experiment in democracy.

- However, the Thais remain an essentially conservative people. In all likelihood September 1975 will find Thailand's economic and political situation not much different than it is today. The military will likely wield somewhat more power than they do now and there may be a substantially reduced U.S. presence.

25X1

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Next 3 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2005/11/23 : CIA-RDP80B01495R000500050022-1